The Grounds and Duty of Christian Rejoicing.

A

SERMON

ON

PHILIPPIANS iv. 4.

By the Late

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PHILIP. iv. 4.

Rejoice in the LORD *alway.*

IF this Invitation of the Apoſtle had been directed to Angels, or glorified Saints — if *they* were commanded to rejoice, who know no Sin, and feel no Sorrow; we ſhould not wonder in the leaſt. — But, for poor Creatures, that are fallen and frail, guilty and undone; for *them* to have no Affection but Joy, no Language but Thankſgiving — *this* may ſeem ſtrange.

Methinks, I hear ſuch a One fetching a Sigh, and replying, with that ſorrowful Woman of old; — "Call me not *Naomi*, call me *Marah*. "I ſee no Cauſe to be chearful, but to be in "very Bitterneſs. The Glory is departed from "my Nature, and there is no amiable Feature

"left

" left in my Mind. I am a grievous *Tranſgreſ-*
" *ſor*, laden with Iniquity and deſerving Hell.
" I have no ſuch Thing as a good Action, to
" mention. My very *Righteouſneſſes* are polluted,
" and unworthy the divine Acceptance. I am
" alſo compaſſed about with numberleſs Enemies
" and Temptations: within, are Corruptions;
" without, are Snares.— And how can ſo ruined
" a Creature rejoice? What has ſuch a One to
" do with the Bleſſing of Peace, or the Voice
" of Melody?"

Allowing this to be thy Caſe, yet be not diſcouraged. The Word, which GOD ſent unto the Children of Iſrael, *preacheth Peace by* JESUS CHRIST. The Goſpel is a *joyful Sound*, which *proclaimeth Deliverance to the Captives*. It bringeth *glad Tidings*, even to thoſe, that are *faſt bound in Miſery and* Guilt. Upon ſuch diſconſolate Wretches the Sun of Righteouſneſs ariſeth, *with Healing under his Wings*. He turneth their Heavineſs into Joy; he putteth off their Sack-cloth, and girdeth them with Gladneſs. Even to ſuch, and not to perfect Beings, the Advice of my Text is addreſſed: *Rejoice in the* LORD *always*.

In

In which Words, you may obſerve two remarkable Things:

I. He bids them to *rejoice*; and that, not in themſelves, but *in the* LORD. In *themſelves*, they will find perpetual Cauſe for Sorrow: in *the World*, perpetual Cauſe for Diſſatisfaction: but, in the LORD, they will find plenteous Redemption and Reſt.

II. Obſerve, further, That this LORD is the LORD JESUS CHRIST. I have known ſome, who, diſcourſing on this Subject, refer it to GOD, conſidered abſolutely, without a Mediator: But, alas! what Joy could iſſue, from an abſolute, from an infinitely righteous GOD, to obnoxious *Sinners?* His Countenance would flaſh nothing but Confuſion and Horror upon whatever is defiled. GOD, out of CHRIST, *is a conſuming Fire:* but, reconciled through his dear Son, is a moſt gracious Father.

Theſe two Remarks being premiſed, let us proceed to ſhew,

I. What there is, in CHRIST JESUS, that may make even Sinners and undone Creatures *rejoice.*

II. What

II. What Reaſon there is to rejoice in CHRIST, not ſometimes only, but *always*.

III. Make a particular Application to various Sorts of Hearers.

I. We are to inquire, What there is in CHRIST JESUS, that may make even Sinners and undone Creatures *rejoice*?

His *Love*:

His *Death*:

His *Righteouſneſs*:

His *Interceſſion*.

(1) Rejoice in CHRIST's *Love*. What though we are unworthy Creatures, poſſeſſed of no amiable Quality, and, perhaps, may have often cried out, with the Pſalmiſt, *No Man careth for my Soul*? Yet, the Son of GOD, the glorious IMMANUEL, loveth us. He loved us from all Eternity. *Before the Mountains were brought forth, or ever the Earth and the World were made*, He formed Deſigns of Love and Mercy towards us. — And whomſoever He loves, He loveth *unto the End*. With Him there is *no Variableneſs, nor Shadow of turning*. His Love, like his Nature, is Unchangeable.

His

His Love, too, is unſpeakably *great*. As is his Majeſty, ſo is his Mercy; exceeding great, yea infinite. How tender was the Love of *Joſeph* to *Benjamin*, when his *Bowels yearned over him*, when he *fell on his Neck and kiſſed him!* How cordial was the Friendſhip of *David* and *Jonathan!* It was *wonderful: paſſing the Love of Women.* How paſſionate and tender is the Concern, which a Mother bears to the Infant at her Breaſt! — Yet, all theſe moſt endearing Names of *Brother*, *Friend*, and *Parent*, are quite loſt, are entirely ſwallowed up, in that of SAVIOUR. Theſe tendereſt Mercies of Mortals, I may boldly ſay, are no better than Cruelty, compared with the ineffably tranſcendent Loving Kindneſs of GOD *our* SAVIOUR.

Surely, then, it muſt be Matter of no ordinary Joy, to conſider the Love which CHRIST beareth to my Soul. He that *ſitteth in the Heavens, over all, from the Beginning*; — He that over-ruleth every Event, and guides the Reins of the Univerſe; — Does HE love *me?* Does He love me with an *invariable* Affection? With an Affection, vaſtly *ſurpaſſing* all the Kindneſs, that ſubſiſts between the moſt endeared Relations? — Surely, I cannot meditate on this, without rejoicing and being exceeding glad. Surely, when I remember

ber JESUS, and all his everlaſting, immutable, inconceivable Affection; I might even ſay, with the royal Prophet, *My Heart danceth for Joy, and in my Song will I praiſe Him.*

(2) Rejoice in CHRIST's *Death.* — CHRIST *our Paſs-over is ſacrificed for us; therefore let us keep the Feaſt.* — Without this precious Sacrifice, our Sins muſt have wounded us with incurable Diſtreſs. For, GOD is offended. He, whoſe Wrath burneth to the loweſt Hell, has been *provoked every Day.* Our Iniquities have been numerous, beyond Expreſſion; and heinous, above all Aggravation. This dreadful *Hand-writing, which was againſt us,* muſt have blaſted all our Delights, and given us *a trembling Heart, and Failing of Eyes, and Sorrow of Mind.* But behold, in our Saviour's Death, a full Atonement! See, in his ſtreaming Blood, a perfect Propitiation! — He is *the Lamb,* the ſlaughtered Lamb of GOD, *that taketh away the Sins of the World.* — Here is an Anſwer to every Accuſation; here is full Payment for all our Debts. — If Conſcience ſmart, this precious Blood is a ſovereign Balm. If my Crimes are as the deepeſt Crimſon, here is *a Fountain opened,* that can make me *white as Snow.*

And

And has not the *Debtor* Reaſon to rejoice, when the Bond is cancelled, and a full Diſcharge put into his Hand? Shall not the *Rebel* rejoice, when his Pardon is ſealed; when the Halter is taken from his Neck, and exchanged for the Ornaments of Grace? — If ſo, who can forbid Joy to *Thee* or *Me?* What can render a true Believer inconſolable? Or rather, what *ſhould* hinder him from rejoicing, *with Joy unſpeakable and full of Glory*, ſince JESUS loves him, and Juſtice acquits him? Sinner, be of good Chear, thy Ranſom is accepted, and thy Sins are forgiven thee.

(3) Rejoice in CHRIST's *Righteouſneſs.* — *The* LORD *hath* DONE, *as well as* SUFFERED, *great Things for us, whereof we rejoice.* Indeed, we have Nothing, Nothing of our own, that we dare to offer to an infinitely pure GOD. We muſt write *Vanity* and *Worthleſneſs* upon our choiceſt Performances. *Bankrupts* we are, and ſhall be, ſo long as we live; yea, we muſt die *inſolvent* to the LORD of all Lords. — But, in JESUS, we have a perfect Righteouſneſs, a complete Obedience. He had a Reſignation to Sufferings, without the leaſt Repining; and a Perſeverance in Duties, without the leaſt Failure. His Holi-

neſs was never ſtained with Impurity, nor marred with the minuteſt Deficiency.

All *we* do, ourſelves, is *Droſs and Dung*; but CHRIST's Obedience the Scripture calls *fine Gold, purified in the Fire.* — Aſk the Opinion of an inſpired Prophet, he will tell you, that our moſt ſhining Deeds are as *filthy Rags*; that is, as incapable of adminiſtering ſound Conſolation to the Performer, as *Rags* are incapable of keeping us warm, amidſt inclement Winds and piercing Froſts: as unable to reconcile us to the righteous Judge, as *filthy* Rags are to introduce us to the politeſt Companies, and recommend us to the politeſt Converſations. — But CHRIST's Righteouſneſs is a durable and illuſtrious Robe. Here is an Obedience, that has ſatisfy'd the ſtricteſt Demands of the Law, and can ſtand before the moſt rigorous Enquiries of Juſtice. This is a Marriage-Garment, that may even challenge the Inſpection of that GREAT KING, *whoſe Eyes are as a flaming Fire.* — Happy, happy thoſe, who are *found* in it, at the laſt awful Day! they ſhall be holy and unreprovable, *not having Spot, or Wrinkle, or any ſuch Thing.*

And is this *my* Portion and Inheritance? Is this immenſe Treaſura, of a Redeemer's Righteouſ-

Righteouſneſs and Obedience, all *mine?* — And ſhall I not be *joyful?* Did the Woman in the Goſpel, that had recovered her ſingle Piece of Silver, go home rejoicing; and ſhall not I rejoice in a Treaſure, that ſurpaſſes *thouſands of Silver and Gold?* A Treaſure, that is richer than all Worlds! in what the Apoſtle juſtly ſtyles, THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST!

(4.) Rejoice in CHRIST's *Interceſſion.* — An excellent Perſon was heard to ſay, "I had ra-"ther have the Prayers of the meaneſt Saint, "than all the Wealth of both the Indias."— Now, if an Intereſt, in the Devotions of a poor imperfect Creature, be ſo deſirable; O! what an inconceivable Advantage muſt it be, to have the Interceſſion of CHRIST JESUS? If all the Saints in the Univerſe were to ſpend their Time in nothing elſe, but in making Supplication for our Happineſs; what would even *this* Importunity be, compared with the Mediation of GOD's dearly beloved SON? — His is *inceſſant.* MOSES's Hands were weary. Every mortal Application muſt ſometimes be diſcontinued. But the *Keeper of* Iſrael *never ſlumbereth nor ſleepeth.* CHRIST ever liveth to act as our Advocate. — His is always *ſucceſsful.* Once, indeed, the LORD hearkened to the Voice of a Man; and commanded

the Sun and Moon to *ſtand ſtill* in their Habitation. Once, alſo, at *Elijah*'s Requeſt, the Clouds withheld their Moiſture, and there was *no Rain for three Years and ſix Months*. But the Father heareth JESUS *always*. The effectual, fervent Interpoſition of that righteous Perſon, *availeth much*; availeth infinitely: availeth to baffle all the Attempts of the Enemy of our Souls, to ſtifle all the Informations of the Accuſer of the Brethren. — Indeed, this availeth to all the Intents and Purpoſes of our Acceptance and Salvation.

Henceforward, therefore, ſays the Chriſtian, let Satan trouble me, and Temptations annoy me: I ſet my Heart at Reſt, notwithſtanding. The *Oil of Gladneſs* ſwims above all theſe Moleſtations, becauſe CHRIST prayeth for me: and, for this Reaſon, my Faith *cannot fail*. Though my Perſon be corrupt, and my Petitions defiled; yet, I cannot doubt of being *accepted in* THE BELOVED, who ever appeareth in the Preſence of GOD for me. Though ever ſo many Calamities ſet themſelves in Array againſt me; yet, He, *who giveth Songs in the Night* of Diſtreſs — He, who ſpeaketh the moſt tempeſtuous Waves into a Calm — that merciful and compaſſionate High-prieſt is *touch'd with a Feeling of* my *Infirmities*.

O! what ſolid Ground for Conſolation is here! what a Rock is CHRIST to ſupport our Happineſs! Remember him always, ye People. Remember his unchangeable *Love* — His atoning *Death* — His meritorious *Righteouſneſs* — His prevailing *Interceſſion*. Remember theſe Things, and go away from this Diſcourſe, as *Hannah* from the Temple, no more ſorrowful, but rejoicing — O! remember JESUS, believe in JESUS, and let the wiſe Man's Advice be thy Practice; "*Go* "*thy Way, eat thy Bread with Joy, and drink* "*thy Wine with a merry Heart: for* GOD now "*accepteth* both Thee and *thy Works*."

II. But it is Time to enquire, What Reaſon there is to rejoice in CHRIST, not ſometimes only, but inceſſantly? Rejoice in the LORD *always*.

It is plain, that *other* Joys have their Periods. They wax and wane. Now, they bloom; anon, they fade. How ſoon does a Fit of Sickneſs reduce our Strength to Labor and Sorrow; and render every Earthly Gratification as inſipid as the White of an Egg? How frequently do even our *Devotional* Pleaſures fail? Our delightful Frames ebb and flow. Precarious and changeable are the Streams; but the Fountain is, *in all Things*, well *ordered and ſure*. You can mention

no

no Condition, in which the true Believer has not Foundation for Joy in CHRIST. This *Tree of Life* beareth Fruit for *every Month*. Though GOD's People have ever ſo much Matter for Lamentation, in themſelves; yet, in their Redeemer, they have Cauſe to rejoice — to rejoice EVERMORE. Becauſe He is

An *ever-preſent* Good;

A *perfect* Good;

A *perpetual* Good.

1*ſt*. CHRIST is an *ever-preſent* Good. *Lo! I am with you* ALWAYS, ſaith the Redeemer, *even unto the End of the World*. — Other valuable Bleſſings are not *always* in our Poſſeſſion. HEALTH *departeth*, ſometimes, *from the Strong*. FRIENDS are ſeparated, frequently, from our Boſom. And RICHES, often, *make themſelves Wings, and fly away*. But JESUS, tho' abſent in Body, is preſent with us in his *Ordinances*, in his *Word*, and ever-preſent with us by his SPIRIT. By this Spirit, He is united as inſeparably to his People, as the Members are to the Head. — By this Spirit, he *dwelleth* in them; *manifeſts* himſelf unto them; and *maketh his abode* with them. — Every Moment of their Lives, they

they can boldly ſay, JESUS is my Guide—JESUS is my Guard — JESUS is my Portion. Therefore, every Moment of their Lives, they have Reaſon to ſay, "Soul, take thine Eaſe; thou "haſt much Goods laid up in thy Saviour, not "for many Years only, but for *everlaſting* "*Ages.*"

2*dly.* We ſhould rejoice always in CHRIST, becauſe He is a *perfect* Good. — There is no poſſible Need, but He can ſupply: no imaginable Grievance, but He can redreſs: no deſireable Bleſſing, but he can beſtow. Yea, in all theſe Caſes, He is able to do for us *exceeding abundantly*, even *above* and beyond *all that we can aſk or think.* — Do we delight in WEALTH? Behold! here are Riches without Meaſure, and without End. Such as no Moth can corrode; no Thief break through and ſteal. — Do we delight in BEAUTY? He is *fairer than the Children of Men*; *chiefeſt among ten thouſand*; *altogether lovely.* — Do we covet HONORS? He is the Glory of Heaven, as well as *the Glory of his People* Iſrael. He exalteth thoſe that humble themſelves, and maketh them *Kings* and *Prieſts* for ever. — In a Word: whatever we can want, or wiſh, to make us bleſſed and happy, here and eternally;

eternally; is centered, is heap'd up, with an inexhauſtible Fulneſs, in CHRIST. So that *the* LORD being our *Shepherd*, we can *lack nothing*.

3*dly*. Again, we are to rejoice in CHRIST always, becauſe He is a *perpetual* Good. — *Death hath no more Dominion over Him. He liveth*, ſaith the beloved Diſciple, *for evermore*. I AM is his Name, throughout all Generations. Hear him ſpeaking of his adorable Self, in this exalted Language: "*I am He, which* IS, *and which* WAS, "*and which is to* COME." The Heavens may *wax old* as a Garment. The Earth may *flee away*, and its Place be no where found. But JESUS our Wiſdom, our Righteouſneſs, our Sanctification, our compleat Redemption, He *ever liveth*. The Kingdom, which He has prepared, is an *everlaſting* Kingdom. The Pleaſures, which he has promiſed, are Pleaſures *for evermore*.

And now, ſince CHRIST is a Good, ever-preſent with us — A Good perfect and without Bounds — A Good perpetual, and without End; ſurely, the Believer has Reaſon to *rejoice* in Him *without ceaſing*.

Having

Having ſhewn, what there is in CHRIST JESUS, that may make even Sinners and undone Creatures rejoice; as alſo what Reaſon there is to rejoice in CHRIST, not ſometimes only, but always; Let me now crave your Attention, while,

III. I make an Application to ſeveral Sorts of Hearers.

To the *Unawaken'd*;

To the true *Believer*;

To the *Afflicted*.

1*ſt*. To the Unawaken'd, thoſe that behold *no Form or Comlineſs* in CHRIST; who have not *taſted* how gracious the LORD is, but ſeek for Happineſs in the Things of this World.—You *ſow the Wind*, and will *reap the Whirlwind*. *Vanity* is your Purſuit, and ſore *Diſappointment* will be the Iſſue.

Your Delights, at the beſt, are empty: no more able to content the Capacities of an eternal Mind, than this feeble Voice of mine can eccho through the Univerſe, or make the whole Creation hear.—And they are not only, at beſt,

void of Happineſs; but, too often, *fraught* with irremediable Woe. Empoyſon'd Sweets! dropping, as a Honey-comb, to depraved Senſe, for a Moment; but deadly, as the Venom of Aſps, to the never-dying Soul.

Oh! leave theſe periſhing and polluted Joys. Feed no longer upon *Huſks*, with Swine; upon *Duſt*, with the Serpent: but cry ſtrongly unto GOD, for *the true Bread which came down from Heaven!* that you may *know* CHRIST, and have *all Joy and Peace in believing*. Whatever you delight in, O ye Sons of Men, if it be leſs than CHRIST; it will prove like *Belſhazzar's* Dainties upon his Tables, when his Doom was upon the Wall. So long as the Splendor of any Thing that is great, or the Conceit of any Thing that is good, keeps you from coming *weary* and *heavy-laden* to CHRIST; you are, without peradventure, in the Way of Perdition. You will, *probably*, taſte the Gall of Bitterneſs, in This Life; but Lamentation, and Mourning and Woe muſt, *certainly*, be your Portion, in the Next. For, this is a ſure Truth, a Truth *eſtabliſhed in the Heavens*; that CHRIST JESUS is the only Fountain of Bliſs: and that the Believer alone has a Patent for rejoicing.

2*dly*,

2*dly*, To the *true Believers*. — Rejoice greatly, O ye Followers of the Lamb. *Let the* high *Praiſes of* your incarnate GOD *be in your Mouths*, and inceſſant Gratitude in your Hearts. Shall the Bridegroom rejoice over his Bride? and ſhall not the humble Soul, that is united to CHRIST, rejoice in that everlaſting Bridegroom, the Almighty Huſband of his Church? — Shall *they* rejoice *that divide the Spoil?* And wilt not *Thou* rejoice, who haſt Sin, and Death, and Hell, conquered for thee, by thy victorious Saviour? — Shall Men rejoice *in Harveſt*, when they gather the Fruit of their Labors? and ſhall not thoſe rejoice, who reap what CHRIST has ſown? Who enter into the precious Profits of his Labors, Agonies, and Death? — Did old *Jacob* rejoice ſo exceedingly, when he heard of *Joſeph*'s Advancement in *Egypt?* and ſhall not *we* even leap for Joy, ſince our Nature is exalted to the *right Hand of the Majeſty on High?* Since our elder Brother fills the Throne above, and has *all Power in Heaven, and on Earth?*

O! *let the Children of* Zion *be joyful in their King!* leſt they diſparage ſo gracious a LORD, and bring an evil Report upon his ſweet Service. You may have many Infirmities; and, I

know, you have treacherous Hearts. You may complain of ſtrong Temptations, and weak Graces. Yet, *your Redeemer is mighty.* His Merits are infinite. Therefore, *rejoice in the* LORD JESUS; *and again I ſay, Rejoice.*

Laſtly, To the *Afflicted.* — Even ye, my Brethren, may rejoice in CHRIST. If your Calamities are temporal, CHRIST has promiſed they ſhall, ALL, *work for your Good.* If you mourn for your Sins, CHRIST has declared, that they, *who mourn,* after this godly Sort, *ſhall be comforted.* The *Paſſover,* though eaten with *bitter* Herbs, was the moſt joyous Solemnity in the *Jewiſh* Church. So CHRIST may be *feaſted* on, though in the midſt of temporal Tribulations, or under the keeneſt Convictions of Iniquity.

Many Times, where the LORD JESUS intends *moſt Comfort,* He USHERS IT IN with *moſt Sorrow.* Is not this Eſtate of yours vaſtly more eligible than all the Pleaſures of Sin? Conſider your Chaſtiſements as Marks of your *Adoption.* And better are the Stripes of a gracious Father, than the Smiles of a flattering World. — This was the Caſe of the holy Apoſtles. Look to their

their *outward* Condition, they ſeemed *always ſorrowful:* yet, in their *inward* Frame, were they not *always rejoicing?* In themſelves, they had *the Sentence of Death:* from the World, they met with *Perſecution* and *Reproach:* but, in CHRIST JESUS, they found Life, Tranquility, and Joy.

Say, therefore, in all thy Deſertions, and in every Diſtreſs; "Though He delay to help "me, yet will I cry after him. Though he "forſake me, for a little Moment; yet will I "wait for Him, 'till, with everlaſting Mercies, "He gather me. Yea, though He *ſlay me, yet "will I put my Truſt in Him,* and ſet my Love "upon Him."

Take the Words; and may the Father of Mercies give you the Faith of that eminent Believer in the Days of old, who, like a good Soldier of JESUS CHRIST, made this noble Declaration: *Although the Fig-tree ſhall not bloſſom, neither ſhall Fruit be in the Vines; the Labor of the Olive ſhall fail, and the Fields ſhall yield no Meat; the Flock ſhall be cut off from the Folds, and there ſhall be no Herd in the Stalls;* — though every

every kind of created Bleſſings ſhould ſink away, and leave me deſtitute of all that the World calls Good, or Senſe feels to be comfortable;——*yet will I rejoice in the* LORD JESUS CHRIST: *I will joy in the* GOD *of my Salvation* *.

* Hab. iii. 17, 18.

FINIS.